

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1340

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 0277

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, QA

SUBJ: AMIR OF QATAR MAY BE BIG LOSER IN GULF GAMES

1. SUMMARY: THE GULF GAMES, A FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT TO BE HOSTED BY GOQ, WAS APPARENTLY CONCEIVED AS OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OFF TO GULF NEIGHBORS MODERN QATAR'S COMING OF AGE. GRANDIOSE PROJECTS BY LOCAL STANDARDS HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN AND COMPLETED TO SUPPORT TOURNAMENT. HOWEVER, DESPITE INITIAL ENTHUSIASM, GAMES APPEAR TO HAVE BOOMERANGED ON AMIR, AND HAVE INCREASED LOCAL CRITICISM OF AMIR'S RULE AS CORRUPT, INEFFICIENT AND WITH A DISTORTED SENSE OF PRIORITIES. REGARDLESS OF OUTCOME ON PLAYING FIELD, IT APPEARS AMIR MAY BE THE GAMES' BIGGEST LOSER. END SUMMARY

2. GOVT OF QATAR WILL HOST GULF GAMES, A REGIONAL FOOTBALL (SOCCER) TOURNAMENT IN WHICH 7 GULF STATES (SAUDI ARABIA, UAE, KUWAIT, IRAQ, BAHRAIN, OMAN, QATAR) WILL PARTICIPATE. GAMES SCHEDULED TO BEGIN
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MARCH 25, AND TO PUT REAL ICING ON CAKE OPENING CEREMONY WILL

TAKE PLACE IN PRESENCE OF SAUDI MONARCH, KING KHALID, WHO EXPECTED TO VISIT QATAR MARCH 25-27. (GAMES HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN SCHEDULED TO BEGIN ON MARCH 21, BUT OPENING DELAYED FOR KHALID VISIT.)

3. AMIR OF QATAR, SHAYKH KHALIFA BIN HAMAD AL THANI, HAS APPARENTLY VIEWED GAMES AS OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS FOUR-YEAR REIGN TO HIS GULF BRETHREN. FOR PAST YEAR, AND PARTICULARLY OVER PAST SIX MONTHS, GOQ AND ENTIRE COUNTRY HAS BEEN TOTALLY OCCUPIED WITH GAME PREPARATIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS. A NUMBER OF SHOWPIECE PROJECTS HAVE BEEN RUSHED TO COMPLETION IN PHENOMENALLY SHORT TIME, INCLUDING A 40,000 SEAT OLYMPIC-STYLE STADIUM (IT CAN HOLD ALMOST ENTIRE QATARI POPULATION), A LAVISH VIP VISITOR COMPLEX, A SATELLITE GROUND STATION, A NEW 170-ROOM ADDITION TO DOUBLE CAPACITY OF GOVT-OWNED GULF HOTEL. INFRA-STRUCTURE, I.E. LIGHTING, ROADS, TEMPORARY HOUSING FOR EXPECTED VISITORS, ETC., ALSO IN FINAL STAGES.

4. DESPITE NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND INITIAL EUPHORIA THAT GAMES WOULD REALLY PUT QATAR ON MAP AND ENHANCE AMIR'S IMAGE, PRESENT GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD TOURNAMENT FROM AMIR ON DOWN ARE SOUR AND RECRIMINATING. WE ARE TOLD THAT AMIR HIMSELF IS LOOKING FOR THE GUY WHO FIRST SUGGESTED THAT QATAR HOST GAMES, AND THAT QATARI MAN IN STREET WISHES THAT HE HAD NEVER HEARD OF THEM.

5. THERE ARE NUMBER OF GOOD REASONS FOR THESE JAUNDICED VIEWS, PRIMARILY COST OF PROJECTS AND RELATED INEFFICIENCY, CORRUPTION AND DISTORTED PRIORITIES. TALES ABOUND ABOUT RAKE-OFFS ON CONTRACTS, EXORBITANT COST OVERRUNS AND MONEY BEING SPENT WILDLY WITH ONLY REQUIREMENT THAT JOB BE COMPLETED BY MARCH 25. LOCAL OBSERVERS CLAIM THAT TOTAL BILL FOR GAMES WILL EXCEED \$200 MILLION. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY RELIABLE SOURCE THAT STADIUM ALONE HAS COST \$150 MILLION

ALTHOUGH MINISTER OF EDUCATION, WHO IS NOMINALLY IN CHARGE OF TOURNAMENT, SWORE THAT TAB WAS ONLY \$45 MILLION. STADIUM HAS BEEN PLAGUED WITH DIFFICULTIES. IN FINAL PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION IT WAS LEARNED THAT IT WAS STRUCTURALLY UNSOUND AND SPECIAL TEAMS OF TECHNICIANS HAD TO BE FLOWN IN FROM U.S. AND U.K. TO SHORE IT UP AT TREMENDOUS COST. STADIUM HAS ALSO BEEN SOURCE OF ADVERSE PUBLICITY ABROAD. LONDON TABLOID PUBLISHED ARTICLE ON STADIUM CONFIDENTIAL

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POINTING OUT ITS COSTS AND WEAKNESSES UNDER HEADLINE "CRAZY GOAL OF A SOCCER-MAD SHEIK". BRITISH AMB HAS TOLD US THAT HE SPENT SOME UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENTS WITH AMIR OVER THIS ARTICLE.

6. ON HOTEL AND VIP VILLA PROJECTS, LOCAL AND FOREIGN CONTRACTORS HAVE GOUGED GOVT WITHOUT MERCY, AND AGAIN BECAUSE OF TIME LIMITATION, GOQ FORCED TO PAY THROUGH THE NOSE FOR EVERYTHING. DOHA AIRPORT HAS BEEN BUSY RECEIVING CHARTER AIR CARGO FLIGHTS OF LAST

MINUTE REQUIRED EQUIPMENT, FURNISHINGS AND THE LIKE FROM FAR CORNERS OF WORLD. VIP VILLAS ARE COSTING AN ESTIMATED \$15 MILLION, WITH SKILLED DECORATORS BEING AIRLIFTED OUT FROM U.K. AND U.S. TO FINISH JOB. HOTEL AND VILLA PROJECTS HAVE BEEN CAUSE OF SHARP CRITICISM IN COUNTRY WHOSE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM IS ACUTE HOUSING SHORTAGE.

7. GAMES HAVE ALSO CAUSED RELATED FOREIGN RELATIONS AND SECURITY PROBLEMS. DURING PAST MONTH IT DAWNED ON QATARIS THAT GAMES COULD BE TEMPTING TARGET FOR CARLOS-TYPE TERRORIST OPERATION, SO THEY CONTRIVED TO RESTRICT DRASTICALLY ATTENDEES FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, CAUSING MANY HARD FEELINGS. ALTHOUGH GOQ HAD INITIALLY PLANNED FOR UP TO 50,000 VISITORS, IT HAS IMPOSED QUOTAS ON NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES TO REDUCE NUMBER TO 15,000. OTHER ONEROUS RESTRICTIONS INCLUDE COMPELLING VISITORS ARRIVING BY LAND TO LEAVE THEIR CARS AT THE BORDER, FROM WHICH THEY WILL BE BUSSED TO CONCENTRATION CAMP-LIKE TENT CITIES NEAR THE STADIUM WHERE ALL NEEDS WILL BE PROVIDED; INMATES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO ENTER DOHA PROPER SOME FIVE MILES FROM THE STADIUM. FURTHER ON FOREIGN RELATIONS ASPECT, WE UNDERSTAND SAUDIS HAVE PROTESTED STRONGLY THAT GOQ HAS BOUGHT FOOTBALL TEAM OF RINGERS FROM NEIGHBORING ARAB COUNTRIES TO IMPROVE ITS CHANCES, AND BECAUSE QATARIS REFUSED TO FIELD REALLY NATIVE TEAM, SAUDIS WILL RETALIATE BY SENDING LESS THAN THE BEST SQUAD FROM THE KINGDOM.

8. RATHER THAN ENHANCING AMIR'S IMAGE AS PREVIOUSLY ENVISAGED, THE GAMES HAVE FURTHER TARNISHED IT. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT KHALIFA MUST BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISTORTED PRIORITIES WHICH GAMES NOW REPRESENT IN MANY QATARI MINDS. GAMES HAVE REINFORCED LOCAL GRUMBLING ABOUT EXTRAVAGANT, POORLY PLANNED PROJECTS, INFLUENCE OF EXPATRIATE ADVISORS, CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES, AND A BREAD AND CIRCUSES MENTALITY WHICH IS NOT IN KEEPING WITH THE MODEST AND MORE CONSERVATIVE CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRY. NO MATTER
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WHAT THE SCORE IS AT THE END OF THE GAMES, IT APPEARS THAT THE AMIR MAY BE THE BIGGEST LOSER.
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